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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ IN MINSK, THE NEW CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

REF: A. 06 MINSK 787

[1](#)B. MINSK 336

[1](#)C. CARACAS 1008

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Belarusian coverage of Hugo Chavez's visit to Minsk focused on the Venezuelan's "anti-imperialist" rhetoric. The militaristic tone of the trip lends credence to suggestions Venezuela will acquire Belarusian dual-use technologies with applications for anti-aircraft systems. As for non-military economic cooperation, the lack of specifics fed suspicion that Lukashenko values Venezuela in part as a safe haven for ill-gotten gains. End summary.

A Common Adversary Joins Lukashenko and Chavez

[1](#)2. (U) Public coverage of Chavez's June 29-30 stop in Minsk played up the dictators' common front against "the empire." Addressing Lukashenko as a "brother," Chavez claimed Belarus and Venezuela had made significant progress on economic cooperation. The Venezuelan boasted to Lukashenko "if we accomplished that much in less than a year (since the 2006 visit to Minsk (ref A)), think what we can do in the 20 years we will both be in power." Lukashenko quipped that Chavez should not scare the Americans.

Dual-Use Technology Likely the Real Deliverable

[1](#)3. (C) Valeriy Karbalevich, political analyst with "Strategy" think tank, told Acting Pol/Econ Chief the sale of anti-aircraft systems and dual-use optical equipment was likely the main purpose of the visit. Aleksandr Alesin, military industry correspondent for the independent weekly "Belarusy i rynok", confirmed Belarus' offerings in these areas would be of interest to the Venezuelans. Chavez's 2006 visit provided the opportunity to inspect Belarusian wares, and now Venezuela could sew up deals, according to Karbalevich. Political scientist Vyacheslav Pozdnyak cautioned that Belarus would receive payment after supplying Venezuela the equipment, and arms deals with Venezuela would not significantly boost the Belarusian economy.

Education and Commercial Cooperation Dubious

[1](#)4. (C) Rhetoric from both sides on progress in trade and investment deals ranging from oil to brick factories contained few specifics. Karbalevich rhetorically asked how

Belarus could enter the construction market in Venezuela when Belarusian companies could not meet domestic demand. In another seemingly over-ambitious deal, the head of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Mikhail Myasnikovich, told press Belarus could provide postgraduate training for 200 Venezuelan students next year. Whatever the realities, Chavez announced Venezuelan-Belarusian cooperation would help the two countries jointly conquer new Latin American markets.

¶5. (C) Belying rumors that he is on the outs, Belarusian Security Council Chair Viktor Sheyman was given special mention in television coverage of the leaders' meeting. Karbalevich said that Sheyman's main task while in Venezuela in April (ref B) could have been to stash Lukashenko's money in a safe place. Karbalevich reasoned that in the past Sheyman had been entrusted as Lukashenko's personal bagman.

Comment: Guns, Butter and Blather

¶6. (C) Lukashenko clearly relishes visits from his international friends. The Venezuelan president's stopovers help Lukashenko burnish his anti-American credentials just as much they help Chavez promote himself as a fighter against U.S. imperialism (ref C). Even better for visitors such as Chavez with money to spare, Belarus does have dual-use technology custom-designed to complement Russian hardware. Economic cooperation outside the military sphere appears the weakest link in the relationship. Lame attempts by the Belarusian media to peddle stories of Belarusian firms helping Venezuela develop economically only fan rumors that Sheyman could have been tasked with preparing Venezuela as a safe haven if Lukashenko ever loses power in Minsk.
Stewart